

INTRODUCTION

Above the Darkness was written mostly in the comfort of a small back yard, on a small deck belonging to a small house with 5 adults, 3 children and a fat cat occupying it. Oh- and the occasional blue heron who sat on top of the neighbor's roof, so he could scope out fish in their small pond and of course inspire me to keep writing.

I was 22 years old and had just graduated from university the previous year. I was unemployed and desperately looking for a job in my field of study (psychology) so my boyfriend and I could move out of his family's house and start our own wonderful life together. What I didn't know at the time is that our wonderful life had already begun. Being in that living situation not only encouraged me to try harder but it also gave me a great amount of strength as I was challenged in many different ways. I even fell in and out of mild depression on many occasions as guilt, and the feeling of uselessness overwhelmed me.

However, even though there has been a lot of down times in my life, I still was not the type to give up easily. One thing I have learned from my mother is that in order to purge those negative feelings all you have to do is reach for something you love and writing was and has always been something I love. I always wanted to write a novel that inspired others and besides looking for a job, I couldn't think of a better way to spend my time than to follow my dream. I asked myself many times "what can I write about?" and "who can I help?" and "how can I help them?" Being a young adult, I didn't feel confident I possessed the wisdom necessary to help others, so even though I wanted to write a non-fiction novel I steered away from it.

One day, I received inspiration for a story, which was eventually to become, *Above the Darkness*. The inspiration didn't bestow upon me as a fully formed idea, and it wasn't all neatly mapped out but at least I finally had a direction. Then, when I finally started writing, I couldn't stop and committed to it more than anything I ever have in my life. It became a need and a drive deep within me as I knew it would have a special meaning not only for me, but others as well. So even though there wasn't much quiet time available in the small, crowded house I took advantage of what time I did have, when everyone else was away at work or school.

Just like the blue heron, there were many helpers and guides that entered my life and helped me finish this book just as they have helped me in the past through rough times. This cast of guides and helpers included the people that I lived with at the time the novel was written, and I will be forever grateful to them for their support. I wanted to get the message out that if we take the time to listen and observe there are many people, animals, spirits, and so on that are capable of assisting us through the difficult times in our lives and can even bring the light back into it when the darkness seems too overwhelming.

I didn't realize before writing *Above the Darkness* who it was meant for. In the moment, it was just for me, as I was discovering myself again and getting reconnected with my spirit. As time went on I've come to realize my greatest intention in life, which has been subtly manifesting itself from when I was a little girl to the moment I finished writing this novel. At that time, I was still looking for a job in psychology (specifically something that involved helping children) as it has always been a passion of mine. I didn't realize that while I was looking for this "perfect" job I was actually already

completing my life's mission! I wanted to get my own wisdom and the wisdom that has been passed down to me out there to children and anyone who might need it as they pass through, and cope with the tribulations of everyday life.

Taking the basics of what inspires me from day to day - nature, animals, humor, love and peace - I was able to construct a story that encompasses all of these things and create a narrator who wasn't nearly as fortunate as I had been to best illustrate what can be accomplished with these blessings.

Above the Darkness is the story of an unlikely heroine who just tries to survive from day to day in the midst of an abusive home. The main character, Elizabeth, takes advantage of the small opportunities she is provided with and is not afraid of taking risks for the benefit of her growth and health. Although many supernatural elements occur in this novel, Elizabeth still has to deal with reality and somehow make her way through it. Sometimes, her travels seem like an escape from her reality, but at other times they can be perceived as an unjust punishment. Through confusion and heartache she is able to find moments of peace. As the reader you get to experience the whirlwind of mysteries uncovered directly from Elizabeth's eyes by taking every step of her journey with her.

Even in a regular human life, there are different developmental stages that need to be overcome in order for one to successfully move to the next level. In *Above the Darkness* Elizabeth also needs to transcend certain levels in order to learn what she needs to do so she can reach her greatest potential. Her patience is tested, and yours will be too, as you make your way to the next level. Sometimes we want to be 10 steps ahead of where we are in the moment but it is so important to appreciate which step you are at now and take the time to learn everything you can from that place. You will be better prepared for the next steps to come and you will also be able to accomplish everything your heart desires.

My hope and dream is that anyone who reads this novel will get at least one thing out of it - whether that be joy, appreciation, connection, hope or even a life lesson. I am not asking you as the reader to take notes and wrack your brain to find the hidden lesson in every sentence but I do ask one thing and one thing only and that is that you open your heart to what *you* need to hear, learn and take away from this journey.

With much love,
Sarah Morrisette

Chapter 1: The Escape

Every day is like the last, rain pouring down on the rooftop while I listen intently for a message. Some days I hear that message so clearly it rings in my ears, but unfortunately, most days my eyes and ears fog up so uncontrollably I fear I am blind and deaf.

The rain has always been a gift and a curse for me. It's a gift because it brings life into the world, as it feeds all living creatures. These creatures are not only my friends but also my helpers, as they show me a new way of life, different ways of thinking, and, most of all, a very special place to which I can escape. Every morning, I ask the birds outside my window if today I can follow them. When I hear them chirp their consent, I am filled with relief and joy.

Their beautiful melodies captivate me to move towards the lush forest where they dance. The other animals, too, join in with pulses mimicking the heartbeats of the earth. When I am there, my body connects to the beats and after a joyous dance, it is rested into complete tranquility.

The curse is that it is harder to escape to the secret paradise when it is pouring rain. The wet and the cold prevent me from escaping my prison; I am a hostage.

Today, however, I was braver than ever. The message was clear to me; I had to leave the house and follow my friends to the special place. The birds were chirping and singing so loudly, I could not deny them. So there I was, piling on layers of clothes and rain gear and nothing was going to stop me.

I ran downstairs, and there it was; the ugliest, scariest monster I had ever known. His eyes so red, I thought blood was going to run down his face. His hair was black and so greasy it glistened like the shell of a beetle. His hands were dry and chapped with dirt underneath the long and sharp claws. His mouth opened, baring his yellow and black crooked fangs, emitting a fearsome roar, "Where are you going, you little tramp?! You look like you were swallowed by a black hole! Go upstairs and change into something a little lady would wear, not the mess you have on!"

A ball of fire grew in my stomach, but instead of releasing it, I cowered and said, "I'm sorry, Father, you're right; I'll go change."

"Damn right you will!" the monster bellowed.

Although I did fear the great monster, I also knew him well. I figured he would forget five minutes later that he even spoke to me. So instead of changing, I waited for my chance to escape my prison from the back window.

As I waited, I listened to the thunder grow louder, and I watched the lightening flash brighter. Like a great percussion band, the thunder crackled and banged. The lightening shimmered and flashed uncontrollably like lights in a night club. I did not fear these great forces but admired their courage to rage on earth as greatly as they desired. I always dreamed of releasing such power on the demons I encountered every day.

Silence fell upon the house, as the storm outside continued, and the storm inside died. I heard no sign of the demons crawling around downstairs. They must have fallen into a temporary slumber. I quickly lifted the window, stuck a wedge in it so it would not

fall on me, and slipped out on top of the roof. I then slid right to the edge of the roof, looked down and noticed it was a steep drop, but I was not scared: any physical pain endured would be worth it and paled in comparison to the pain I had to deal with inside my prison.

Examining the deck that was about five feet lower than the roof, I finally decided on the perfect spot to reach the banister. Turning on my belly, I shimmied down anticipating the feel of the banister below my feet. When my feet reached it, my forehead was level with the edge of the roof. My hands gripped tightly as I crouched down until they could no longer hold and I was forced to let them fall. I was now grasping onto the banister with both hands. I took a deep breath in and then out. As the air pushed through me, I took a final jump onto the floor of the deck. Now that the hard part was over, I looked up to let the rain wash over my flushed face. Grabbing the floor of the deck, I then dropped into a very old pile of leaves.

The leaves were wet and composting beautifully, which made for a light fall. Winter's snow had recently melted, leaving tons of dead foliage from last autumn. The dull scent from the leaves with the refreshing smell of new buds and spring rain made for an intoxicating aroma. Although I could not bask in the gorgeous scent for long, I took in deep breaths before hopping to my feet and making a run for it. Nature's perfume gave me a much-needed boost of energy, more powerful than any drink...

Chapter 2: Forest Heaven

A two and a half minute sprint laid the thick and abundant forest. When I arrived I took a few more deep breaths of a similar and equally intoxicating scent, which seeped out of the forest. The forest called my name over and over, seducing me to step slowly into its magical darkness.

Little streams of light shot through the forest capturing the raindrops like crystal reflectors. There were tiny plants and enormous trees of any size imaginable. A rainbow of colours flourished in the shadow of the forest's towers. The thick forest acted like millions of umbrellas covering me so adequately that only a few drops of purity fell through the canopy and into my mouth. It tasted divine, better than any water I have ever tasted. It was almost alive, as it trickled down my throat, quenched my thirst and nourished every organ in my body. It was so moist and sweet that I salivated for more. I stood there, 20 feet into the forest, with my tongue out, and savoured the juices of life.

I did not truly understand why the allure of the forest was so powerful that morning until I tasted those drops of ecstasy. It gave me the strength to keep breathing and moving. Every now and then, the Earth gives me this gift. I am thankful every time this gift is offered to me and I hope my appreciation will lead to better and bigger drops of life.

Once I had my big sip of the magical forest, I decided to explore a little further. It was hard to walk since the forest was thick with emerging seedlings, but I managed to make a friendly path with the help of the ground creatures. I followed them, and they taught me where to step so I did the least amount of damage. At the end of the path was what I was waiting for, the special place to call my own. It was a great big tree, with lots

of larger branches that grew close to the ground, unlike the other trees whose branches started up much farther.

I climbed up high enough to see the Earth's most powerful entities. It took my breath away, as it always did. Instead of the raw and rough power the mountains normally exuded, fog wrapped around the nearly invisible snow covered tops. It reminded me that even the most powerful sometimes needs a blanket of comfort around them and that they can become more beautiful with their quiet power and vulnerability. The mountains, like the forest and its creatures, never failed me, unlike my family.

Although I wished to stay there forever, I could not. I had to eat, and my snacks had run out. I also knew that it was close to dinner time and my family would notice I wasn't there. It was a rule in my house to always be there for dinner. I wasn't quite sure why, since we didn't spend that time talking happily about our day or sharing anything more than harsh words and hostility. Regardless, I did not want to pay the consequence for not showing up, so I rushed home.

Chapter 3: The Dinner Table

I came home to the worst part of my day; suppertime always seemed to be filled with constant yelling and bickering. There was never enough food and always too many people. It was as if there had been a drought and the only food left was placed in front of a bunch of fierce predators. I was the little bird waiting patiently on the sidelines to see if I could get some scraps. Most days I would fail at doing so adequately, but today I got lucky. One of my brothers was at a hockey game with his friends. They managed to slip past security and steal some food as well. A part of me admired my brother's risk-taking, and another part of me often wondered if it was just pure stupidity. He did get to eat and see an NHL game for free, while I was sitting at the dinner table with the rest of the predators scraping over the last bits of food.

I have three brothers and three sisters, and I am number seven. My parents don't believe in birth control. According to their religion it is a sin, but to me, having seven children and not being able to feed them or give them appropriate attention and abusing their spirits is a much bigger sin. The two oldest, 20 and 19, are both boys. The next two, 17 and 16, are both girls. Number five is 14 and a girl, and number six is 13 and a boy. If those two were switched, then maybe I would have someone to confide in, but a 13 year old boy in the middle of two pubescent girls a parallel universe is created amongst us. I am the youngest at age 11.

My mother is a stay-at-home mom who never stays at home. Now, don't get me wrong, most of the time she is home, but to me she is somewhere else, somewhere with a drink in one hand and a jay in the other. I sometimes pretend I am watching a movie star who is driven by the inspiration of her dysfunction and addiction. When I look at her this way, she becomes entertaining to me, instead of a slug squirming around at the bottom of a barrel.

She makes me laugh, dancing around the room, swearing and complaining about my father. She tells me he thinks he's God, but he can't even perform in bed. I'm not sure exactly what that means, but I'm sure it's something about sex. In that case, thank God he has problems or I would have even more demons running around me. Secretly,

he probably believes it to be a blessing as well. My mother on the other hand loves to have her audience, creating a different reaction every five minutes. One minute, she is making you laugh, the next she is making you cry, and then she is making you think you are going crazy, as she spins out of control.

At least my mother can be entertaining; Father is just enormously scary. We never know when he is going to crack, never know when he is going to show up in our room, or even know when he is going to come home. So, we have learned to always be prepared, always be on alert and to always be guarded.

Today was no different than any other, perhaps even worse. Just when I was about to reach for the few pieces of chicken left on the table, my father yelled, "What the hell do you think you are doing?!"

"Nothing, I just haven't had any chicken yet."

"Your brother is the one who will need to keep his strength for the big game. He needs to be the best damn hockey player this country has ever seen. The rest of you are useless, never doing what I ask, never contributing to this family; you are a bunch of low lifes like your freeloading mother!"

I watched my oldest brother, Jamie, as he stood up for the rest of us, who sat speechless. His eyes pierced like knives as his face grew redder than blood and he rose from his chair and snapped, "Screw you Dad; I work every day to bring you money! Matt is the only one who you ever give credit to just because he can play hockey. He doesn't even work; he just goes out with his friends all day. Like tonight, you have no idea where your so-called perfect son is now, do you?!"

That was a big mistake. After that, everything was mostly a blur. I heard a lot more yelling, cursing, and punching. By the end of it, the door slammed behind my father and tires squealed as he drove out of the driveway. My brother lay there, covered in blood, and I thought he might die this time. My mother scrambled for the phone to call the family doctor. She would not take any of us to the hospital for fear that the community might find out what our family is really like. That realization seemed to be more frightening than the fact that her son was beaten half to death by her husband.

The family doctor was also a creep. He attended the same church as us and his daughter, Stacy was one of my only friends. We told each other our deepest and most disturbing secrets, mostly regarding our families. I guess our friendship was one good thing about being secretive, although what we truly desired was to live happily, rather than to suffer in secrecy together.

Before the doctor left, he advised my brother to stay inside-not to heal- but to hide what had happened. My brother agreed at that time, and said he would call in sick to work for the next two weeks, but I knew he could not last that long being in this house.

I decided to have a few words with Jamie, as he knows better than anyone to keep silent when dad is in one of his moods. "What were you thinking, you big dumbie?"

"I just can't stand the way he undermines us like that, especially you. You out of all of us don't deserve that. You always do everything that is expected of you. And it is

so frustrating how he always talks about Matt, like he's God, when he's the most useless."

"I know Jamie. I appreciate you sticking up for me, but I don't need you to, I can handle it. Now look what you have gotten yourself into; you're out of work, and- stuck here. You might not get to leave for longer now."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. I know you've been saving up to get out of here, and you deserve to."

"Thanks, sis but, like you, I can handle myself too. I will find a way, don't you worry."

I just frowned, while a tear rolled down my face, and whispered, "I know. I know... Just be careful...I love you."

My mother punished me for starting the whole thing. She figured I was to blame because I was the one who got father mad in the first place, and the one responsible for Jamie's outburst. She said I should always ask before taking food from the table, especially the last of it, which was new to me because no one ever asked. Yet, I agreed because I did feel guilty; I hated to see my brother like that.

Chapter 4: Full of Comfort

I stayed in my room the whole night. I mostly just stared at the wall thinking of ways to conquer the world, well, my parents, who were the force behind the whole world to me.

Suddenly, I heard the rain again. Pit pat. Pit pat. Pitter pat. It made this rhythm over and over for about an hour. Then it got faster and louder until it sounded like golf balls hitting the roof. I never fall asleep unless it rains. Lucky for me that was most nights. Tonight, however, it was even harder to sleep due to my overwhelming guilt. I could not stop thinking of what could've happened to my brother and how it could happen to any of us, at any time. I knew I needed to dream. It was the only way to make me feel better: to find an answer. I thought of earlier that day when I was in the forest and imagined the magical smell, the delightful taste of the rain, and the striking appearance of the lush trees and plants. It captured my heart as I fell into a deep, deep sleep.

I woke up, or I thought I woke up. I was not in my room, and, as a matter of fact, I was not even in the world I knew. I looked at my hand; it had turned purple and was hairy. I was fuzzy and purple! I could not believe it. *I must still be in my dream! But it felt so real- what was going on?* I checked my surroundings and all I could see were these little green plant-like organisms that sprouted up everywhere, but they were nothing like I had ever seen before, and I know my plants.

All of a sudden, they looked up at me and they were alive! I was scared at first but they seemed friendly enough. I think they greeted me, but I couldn't be quite sure, since they spoke in a language I had never heard before. They kept staring at me and each had an individual eye that looked like a nose. Over and over they also said: "Geeshga! Geeshga!" I wasn't sure where the noise was even coming from; they didn't appear to have mouths, but they certainly seemed happy to see me.

I kept walking, making sure not to step on any of them, waving with my new fuzzy purple hand of which I found myself growing quite fond of. The land was covered with these creatures as far as I could see. The flat land went on for miles and miles with no sign of an end or different landscape. I was walking for so long my feet should have hurt, but they didn't. All I felt was a light softness, like I was gliding on a cloud. Just as I came to this realization, I fell through this cloud-like land and surprisingly, I didn't get that 'stomach flying out of the body' feeling as expected.

I was then surrounded by another flat, soft landscape, but this time there were creatures that looked very similar to the brand new appearance I adopted. They had fuzzy soft purple bodies and their faces, like the other creatures, each only had one eye that looked like a nose and no mouths. They also had paws for hands and feet and their ears were rounded like a bear's.

One popped up in front of me excitedly, as if it knew I was a foreigner and started speaking really fast, "Geeshga, wooda wooda, ooki, tee tee, rum rum, hur, lito, bya, oopee, bonjour, aloha, hola, hallo, ciao, hello..."

"Hello!" I said loudly to let the intelligent creature know what language I spoke.

"Aah, yes, an English-speaking human. We have not had one of those in a very, very long time. It is my pleasure to welcome you to Geeshgawoodiooki. It is named after the three ways to say hello on our dimension."

"Dimension? I thought this was just a dream, or at least thought it was just another planet."

"Oh no, young one, you are in another dimension, or as you might say another time in space. We exist at the same time and location as you exist. This is why I know all of your languages, and I also know all of the languages that exist in the universe," the furry purple creature said proudly.

"Wow. That is amazing, but how did you come to learn all of these languages, when I have never heard any of yours?"

"Well, that is a very long story, my friend. Come, let us eat first, and then we will share."

I was not going to argue with that since my stomach was grumbling- which I thought was strange because earlier my feet didn't hurt and I never felt that weird falling feeling. My mind quickly wandered back to my stomach. It was now making louder grumbling noises. The funny little creature assured me that we would be there soon and sure enough, he didn't lie, for in seconds we were there.

It was the biggest gathering I had ever seen. Every creature in this dimension ate together at the exact same time. I was so shocked that I almost couldn't eat, but the smell was too alluring to resist. I came to what was their version of a dinner table, but they did not call it that and it didn't even look remotely close to any dinner table I had ever seen, for it was completely invisible. The only way to know it existed was to run right into it.

"Stop! You will knock over all of the food!" my purple friend warned me as it pulled me back before I ran into the table. "I am sorry, I forgot to mention that every

object we possess is invisible, so you have to be very careful and learn to rely on your sense of touch. “

“Well, I haven’t run into anything yet, so you must not have very many material things.”

“No. We find no need for them. We have created a few practical objects. Like this grand food placer. It holds our food higher than the ground so we do not have to eat right from the ground.”

“Hmm, that makes sense. So this is the food then? The bubble things floating over there?”

“Yes, but they are not floating my friend. And I must warn you, they are quite filling, so as you humans put it, try not to stuff your face.”

I giggled, and then replied, “OK, I will try not to.”

Abruptly, my purple friend’s voice echoed in my ear, “GEESHGAWOODIOOKI! Chi ikki oodiu tu dri! Tiu ir” As he stopped suddenly mid-sentence, he whispered to me, “....sorry I did not catch your name?”

“That’s okay. My name is Elizabeth.”

“ELIZABETH!” Everyone started making all sorts of noise that sounded like cheering. “Hee iktu tom EARTH!” Again, everyone started cheering loudly. I felt like a celebrity. Never in my life had I experienced so much appreciation, especially without doing anything to deserve it. I was so touched, my eye began to water. The energy was so powerful, yet so uplifting I could not help myself.

“Oh don’t cry my friend. We are your friends now and are here for you. Now let us eat!” Immediately, everyone started eating the bubble food. I picked one up ready to put it in my mouth, when I realized I did not have a mouth. “Excuse me, um, purple friend, how do I eat?”

“My name is Oochoo, and here let me show you,” Oochoo said as he popped one of the bubbles on his head. So I did the same and never had so much fun eating in my life! And I never felt so full! I ate three bubbles, and that was one too many, but Oochoo let it go. I think he knew I hadn’t had a good meal in a long time.

After my crazy, yet miraculous experience eating, I followed Oochoo to his house, which of course was also invisible. I knew we were inside when a thin wall rose up in a circle around us and we could no longer see outside except through some oval shaped windows. I thought this was strange since everything was supposed to be invisible, and it was- from the outside. Maybe it was because - like a house on Earth - it was there for security. I could have asked Oochoo about it, but instead I decided to enjoy the unfamiliarity.

I began to feel around for something to sit on. Oochoo guided me to what felt like a bean bag chair floating in the air. “These chairs are very comfortable, thank you.”

“Oh you are quite welcome, Elizabeth. Comfort is very important in our dimension. We strive to always be comfortable and have full bellies. We believe if we can accomplish this, then everything else will fall into place. Our happiness comes from

this place of comfort and satisfied bellies. It makes us feel safe, and when others give us gifts that support these things, then that is when we feel love.”

“On Earth, having full bellies is more of a luxury. For most of our kind this is hard to come by or sometimes never comes at all, while some of us always have our bellies full - too full actually. I guess if we too strived to feed everyone, then there would be more happiness on Earth. Also, comfort is an interesting concept on Earth. Again, it is more of a luxury, only few of us are able to be comfortable all of the time. But I agree, feeling comfortable also denotes a sense of safety as well.”

“You are very insightful my friend. You understand more than creatures on earth realize I bet. This is why they have chosen you.”

“They? What have they chosen me for? I don’t think I’m that smart. I’m only eleven.”

“Age is not important. Some of the most intelligent creatures are very young. Do not put yourself into a certain category before you discover everything.”

“Well, it would take some time to discover everything. I don’t think I will live that long!”

“Again, age doesn’t matter. Do not put limitations on yourself. Your capabilities are endless. As you have discovered today, or tonight in your dimension, anything is possible, right?”

“Yes. You have opened my eyes to some incredible possibilities, but I’m still confused about something. If our dimensions exist exactly at the same time, then why is it day here and night on Earth?”

“That is a very good question. It is kind of like time-zones on Earth. Everyone exists at the same time, but it just happens to be dark in one area, and light in another. Some might say one part of the earth is ahead of another, but really it is not; it all coexists at one time. We happen to have a very short night that lasts 2 hours. We also sleep during this time, but we do not need as much sleep as humans do. Two hours is enough to feel fully energized and leaves us more time for fun activities.”

“Can I participate in one of these activities?”

“Well, yes, you did already. Eating! Which we do for a half an hour 10 times a day, every 2 hours. As you might have calculated, that equals 25 hours plus the 2 hours we sleep, which is 27 hours in a total day. Now, I know what you are going to say, ‘How can that be when our time exists at the same time earth does?’ Well, this is simple: our hours are shorter. What you may call an hour, is not equivalent to our hours. That is putting it simply. It is much more complicated than that. And as you discover in other dimensions, you will see many different ways of looking at time.”

“Wow. Okay. I just wanted to learn one of your games, but all that is good to know. Thank you. And – wait - you said I will discover other dimensions?”

“Yes, Elizabeth, as I said, you were chosen to be a traveller, as was I.”

“But who chose me and why?”

“Well, you were chosen by the wise ones. This is a group of spirits who look over the dimensions. This will become clearer to you as you discover more. But for now you do not need to know why, and I am not even sure if I can explain that to you. I know why I was chosen, but I found this out after years of travelling. The important thing is that you were chosen for a reason, and now we finally have an appropriate traveller from Earth. The spirits have been searching for a long time. Feel honoured Elizabeth, for you have a great job ahead of you.”

I was taken completely by this explanation and suddenly felt a huge sense of responsibility on my heart. Ochoo could see this in my eye, and said sweetly, “Don’t you worry. You will be amazing. Just think of it as something fun you get to do every night. Do not put too much pressure on yourself. Your job is to learn for now.” He gave me a very long and comforting hug. I cried briefly and then spoke with every sincere inch of me, “Thank you.”

Chapter 5: A New Morning

When I woke up nothing appeared the same. The size of the window, the posters on the wall, or even the very existence of my mouth didn’t seem the same. I touched my lips, then my tongue and nibbled on my fingers just to be sure my teeth were there.

I breathed so easily, but more powerfully than ever. I could feel the energy well up inside my stomach and make its journey up through my body and, as the air passed through my lips, it tingled with pleasure.

As a baby grabs its toes examining their every quality, I too was doing the same with myself, inside and out. Except now I had the wisdom of knowing I was a part of something bigger and more beautiful.

The newness overwhelmed me. Not because I didn’t like it but because I knew I had no part in it. It was as if someone had decided it for me. That concept was scarier than my father: a power so great it could control my destiny, my dreams? No - I could not believe that. Somewhere inside of me knew I had chosen what I was about to embark on. I did not know how, where, when or with who, I just knew it was what my heart craved. And I was determined to figure out those mysteries. In the meantime, I had to deal with my reality at home.

Just like my awareness of my body, my situation at home also took on a new reality; as I found it easier to cope. I walked down the stairs slowly, instead of running. I listened and watched around the corner of the kitchen to scope out the present situation. My mother was drinking orange juice, but it was spiked with whisky, of course and she was humming a tune very familiar to me. It was the lullaby she used sing to me when I was an infant “Hush little baby, don’t say a word.”

I felt a sudden shift within my body. I felt I had become a baby again. My mother's humming brought me right back to my first days of life. Her touch was gentle and loving. The rocking motion put my anxiety at ease and the sound of her voice brought life into my heart. It was one of the few times my mother showed pure love for me.

Eventually this song became entrenched with poison. As I grew older, the words grew meanings, and these meanings were very true to how I was treated. I was never

allowed to speak and if I was, I was punished. However, if I did what they wanted I still felt punished, for I never got any of the rewards the song promised.

Although I was not looking to get a shiny ring, I was simply looking for the energy of pure love that my mother once gave to me as she sang this song. But that had not happened since I was a newborn. For this reason, I had a lot of built-up resentment. My expectations for my mother were once high, but now I place no expectations on her at all.

Today, however, was much different; I was reborn and therefore nothing was clearer than her loving energy. Before, I could never look past the negativity that she exuded with her drinking, but today I finally did.

“Elizabeth, come here and stop daydreaming. Why don't you finish up breakfast here? I have to take care of something,” my mother demanded.

“Okay mom.”

She raised her voice as she left the room and said, “Glad to see your attitude has changed!”

She was right. My attitude had changed, but it had nothing to do with me trying to please her or my father. I simply did not want to waste energy resenting everything. Instead, I gave in to the imposed responsibility and made the most of it. I cooked a huge pan of bacon, a mountain of blueberry pancakes, fried potatoes, and eggs Benedict. I also cut up 3 plates full of fruit.

“Well, look at you Miss thang, all grown up, makin' breakfast for everyone. I never thought I'd see the day! You must be feeling guilty for yesterday huh?” I tuned out my 16 year old sister, Christine. She always tried to push my buttons and she did successfully most of the time, but I was not going to give her the satisfaction of pissing me off. “Well come on Lizzy, aren't you going to say anything?”

“No. I am quite fine thanks. There is fruit there on the table and I have your plate of pancakes keeping warm in the oven.”

“Made with blueberries?”

“Yup, it's just how you like them.”

She put her hand gently on my shoulder as I passed her the plate. She breathed in gently, “Mmm, smells good sis.” I was expecting a thank you, but I knew she appreciated it, since no one has made her favourite meal for years. She used to have blueberry pancakes on her birthday every year, but that faded. I knew this because she often brought this up in fights with our mom. She used this as an example of my mother's neglect. This was the least severe of the examples, but it seemed to be the safest one to bring up.

“I think I smell bacon!” Both Jamie and Matt exclaimed at the same time, as they graced the kitchen with their barbaric presence. It was like nothing had ever happened, as usual. Strangely, Jamie didn't show any sign of bitterness. His and Matt's brotherly love, or should I say their camaraderie always seemed to push through. Mostly for survival

reasons, they felt the need to stick together- as did my two oldest sisters, Samantha and Christine. The three youngest, including me had to fight alone.

“Yo Lizzy, izzy, shawizzy, Can you get me one of those fine lookin' eggs benedicters?” Normally my 13-year old brother's attempt to act cool would irritate me as much as a swarm of mosquitoes attacking me, but I decided to laugh and say, “No problemo, Jordon, dog.”

“HAHAHA, oh man Liz, what has gotten into you today?”

“Not sure Jordan, maybe your coolness rubbed off on me.”

“I don't know about that. But you sure are funnier. Thanks for the grub Liz-a.” He was the only one who thanked me, even though I could tell the rest of them did appreciate it, through their enthusiasm.

All except Sam: she was always reacted differently to everything, than the rest of them. “Oh great, more food to get fat from. Are you trying to kill me Elizabeth? You know I am on a diet.”

“Well, there is some fruit there, you can have that, right?”

“No thanks. I can't stand the smell of all this grease. I'll just grab a glass of water and get out of here.” I just sighed in disappointment. I felt sorry for her obsession with weight. I did not understand it much, mostly because she had never been fat. In fact she has always been a toothpick. I figured the need to be skinny was a lot like my mother's need to have alcohol, in that it seemed like a solution to her problems, when, in fact, it was just causing more problems.

The other day, I went to use the washroom and I could hear Sam barfing up dinner. My first reaction was anger because I didn't even get to have dinner that night, but that quickly turned to sadness. I would give anything to see her healthy again and to have her realize how beautiful she is. In my family I could never say that to her though, for I would be ridiculed. Besides, she probably wouldn't believe me, just like my mom doesn't believe me when I tell her she doesn't need alcohol to be a good woman.

“Hey Sam! Wait up,” I cried out, hoping she would hear me.

“What do you want now Elizabeth?” she asked in an irritated voice.

I wrapped my arms around her waist, looked up at her and said, “You are the most beautiful young woman I have ever seen. Please come eat with us, it would mean the world to me.”

Her eyes got watery, but quickly she pushed me away and said, “Maybe, but you can't let me eat any of that bacon.”

“Sure thing- I think Jamie and Matt probably ate the whole plate already anyways.” She laughed for the first time in a long time, and then followed me back into the kitchen.

My 14-year-old sister Ruth was still sleeping, so I sent my brother Jordan up to get her. Lately, that seemed to be all she does. She has not even gone to school in the last 2 weeks. My parents don't know of course, because if they did, the consequences would

be unspeakable. She had kept a note from her doctor and my mom, when she was sick, and copied their exact handwriting and signature as a way of getting out of school. It was pretty impressive how well she could copy it, even though what she was doing was wrong.

I had tried talking to her a couple of times, but like I said before, we don't seem to connect at all, unfortunately. Honestly, if I was her, I would probably not be able to get out of bed either. She had gotten the worst of dad.

About a month ago, just before she stopped going to school, I heard her screaming in the middle of the night for help. My sister Christine and I were the only ones who heard it. We both rushed to her bedroom listening from the outside of the locked door. I couldn't say what exactly I heard for it was too disturbing to remember. I asked my sister Christine what was happening, and all she could say was, "Someday you will understand, but I pray that you don't. Quick, get back to bed, before he hears us." I prayed a lot that night, for it to stop happening to her and wishing that it would never happen to me. All I knew was that it happened to all the girls in my family, but after a certain age they didn't have to put up with the torture anymore. I had wished I could skip the age where my father's demon would take hold of me, but I knew it was inevitable.

"Nope. She won't come down. She says she feels sick, which I think is bull crap. But oh well, more for us, right?" Jordan announced as he waltzed back into the kitchen.

I looked at him with my brows furrowed. I could feel the heat rushing to my face. If he only knew, what she had to endure...

At that moment my father came in the door. We weren't sure where he had been, even though he said he was at the store. It was Sunday morning and barely any stores were open at 8:30 in the morning. We didn't question his story though- we knew better.

"Where's your mother? What the hell is she doing making you cook breakfast, that lazy whore."

I lied, and said, "I am only making sure things don't burn. She made it all." My siblings looked at me shocked that I lied, and shocked that I had tried to protect mom.

My mom walked in at that moment as if she sensed he was home and quickly took over in the kitchen. "Here is your favourite; eggs Benedict, extra bacon and fried potatoes on the side." She said it so convincingly, it seemed like she believed she made it! Which was good for me, only because I wouldn't be caught lying.

He put his plate down on the table then stood there looking down at us with his eyes bulging and hands on his hips, then said, "Now! Does everyone know what day it is?" He asked us this question like we were in kindergarten learning the days of the week. Except he wasn't capable of asking in a friendly way like a school teacher would.

"Yes, father, Sunday of course." We all said almost in unison.

"Good. Now your asses better be in the car by 9:15 sharp." he paused, looked around, and then said, "Where the hell is that Ruthanne? She better not still be asleep." At that moment she rushed down the stairs pulling her shirt over her head. "I was just in the shower; I am here now father, all ready to go." She must have heard dad coming in the door. She always had a knack for being "just in time".

“Well good! Glad to see someone has it together!” He then took his breakfast from the table, walked heavily to the front door and slammed it behind him. He never ate with us in the morning unless there were overnight guests. He ate in his car while he smoked and drank his coffee. We always joked about how he had to have his morning meeting with himself, to plan how he was going to torture us for the day.

After that we all ate quickly, and started to take turns for our three-minute showers. Ruth really had not showered; she just wet her hair and face in the sink before coming down the stairs so that her performance was believable. The rest of us didn't have her kind of talent with acting. Maybe it was because we didn't have as much to lose as she did.

The oldest was always first. It was more important for them to be clean and look good than the younger ones because they interacted with more people. The younger ones could hide in the back, being smelly. Well, that was Jamie's explanation, anyways. He usually had a half-assed explanation for everything.

Chapter 6: The Mask of Faith

I usually dreaded church. I found it boring, non-beneficial, and mostly irritating. It was the people I found irritating, for most of them were pretentious- always coming to church but never really bettering their souls. They usually acted like a bunch of vampires, sucking the life out of each other, but never getting satisfied. This reminded me of my dream, or should I say my “travelling experience” the night before. The creatures on the dimension Geeshgawoodiooki, also wanted to be full at all times, but instead of stealing from each other, they cooperated to make sure everyone was full.

Being at church was like an illusion because there were all these people looking for answers, and wanting to be filled, but they stole the fulfillment of others to get it. Of course this never worked, since most people left feeling even worse than when they walked in. These people claim to be there for God and to get help from him but I didn't believe this. To me it was more of a social game for them. They went to make themselves feel better and get the latest gossip. Don't get me wrong, there were a few that took this time to reflect on themselves, their lives and what they can do better. These people looked to God, or what they say is God anyways.

It was also sad to see that so many of them were using God as a distraction from their problems, and as a way out of taking responsibility for their actions. My mother fell under this category. I could hear bits and pieces of my mother's prayers. They often had to do with her addiction and she asked for guidance to raise her children. But then this was often followed with several excuses as to why she has not made any changes, and blames her misfortunes on God.

My father, on the other hand, only pretended to pray; just like he pretended to be a good father, and pretended to be a stand up citizen. He was a complete fraud. I could say that my mother, my siblings, and I are the only ones that really know who he is but that wouldn't even be accurate. The “bad” man act seemed be just as much as a lie as the “good” man act. I never know what is going on in his mind, and probably never will. A part of me wishes I could know, but mostly I am glad that I do not. I am too scared to

know the truth. It is bad enough knowing what he is capable of doing to his family; I wouldn't want to know what kind of sick things went through his mind.

Church was a whole new experience for me today. Instead of observing everyone and trying to listen to what the priest was saying and trying to make sense of it, I just went inwards, and silenced my mind. I never thought to do this before, but today it was simply my natural reaction. So instead of leaving the church feeling confused, drained, and irritated, I felt relaxed and even happy.

After Church, there was always a huge get together at the local restaurant for lunch. I was tempted to sneak away, as usual, but I figured I shouldn't today, since my father seemed more on edge than usual. So, instead, I waited it out, and tried to block out all the mindless chatter by focusing on the beautiful view out the window. It was the only thing I loved about the restaurant. I could see the peaks of glory and clear blue sky cascaded behind it. The sun shined even more luminously, creating fairy dust that bounced off the snow. I pictured myself at my special tree, feeling glad that I would be there soon.

Chapter 7: The Evidence

Surprisingly, the normally long lunch seemed to go by as fast as the speed of light. And yet, the crammed car ride home was a different story. Everyone was complaining on the way about how cramped it was and how much better this would be if Jamie hadn't gotten in a car accident. This made the ride home seem like at least an hour long, even though we were only a few blocks away.

Finally, we pulled into the driveway and everyone was still yelling at each other, when my father decided to join in, "Shut up! Yes, your brother is stupid but I am tired of all of your whining, you sacks of shit! Now, when you get out of this car, you better shut your traps so the neighbours don't hear!" It seemed the neighbours' opinions were more important than his kids'. We didn't expect much more than that, since his "good" man act benefited him more than his "bad" man act - well, in public anyways.

I managed to sneak in the backyard and find my way to the forest. Usually, I would not do this, because Sunday is the only day that my dad stays with us from the morning to suppertime, so I knew he would notice I was gone. But I was sure after the car incident, that he would be happy to get rid of any of us. I felt a need to go to the forest today, despite the apparent consequences. Something was pushing inside of me to go.

As I stood at the edge of the forest, I could almost hear Oochoo's voice saying something. I closed my eyes and tried to listen intently. Still, I could only hear a faint whisper. I started to walk into the forest, and the voice grew louder. I started to follow the voice, until it led me right to my tree. I could hear the voice clearly now and it was saying, "Come my friend. I need to show you something." Just then, I saw a ghost-like image of Oochoo hovering in the air in front of me. "Can you see me, Elizabeth?"

"Yes! Yes I can! This is incredible, so I am not crazy after all?" I said while jumping up and down and clapping my hands.

His eye lit up, "Hehe. No, no. You are not crazy. If anything, you are enlightened. Here, I left you something that you can bring back to your house. It is for safety, because

I have been watching over you for a while and I can see that you need protection.” His face was now solemn.

I nodded in agreement, “That is for sure. So what is it?”

“It will appear as soon as I go. Right now, I need to tell you something.” Oochoo said while gliding down closer to me.

“Yes?”

“Well, tonight you will again explore another dimension. But I need to warn you that it will not be pretty. It will be very chaotic but you will be safe, as long as you bring what I am about to leave you. This will give you safety in all dimensions.” His big one eye looked down at me like a parent does when warning you to look both ways when crossing the road.

“Well thank you for the protection. But I have to ask, do I have a choice in going?” I felt a big lump in my throat as I asked this. I knew what the answer was going to be, but I figured it wouldn’t hurt to ask. I really didn’t want to cross that road.

He paused for a moment, and put his paws together getting ready to hand me the news. “Unfortunately, no. There are lessons that you need to learn before you move on. But, I promise you, this is the only dimension that you will feel scared in, besides the one you are living in now on Earth. Do not try to avoid it by staying awake. Please embrace this experience. You will see the benefits of the lessons right away.” He then gave a nod of certainty.

“Well thank you for the heads up. It is appreciated very much. And, I will do what I must.” I said with a lot less certainty.

He swirled around me with excitement, “I am very glad to hear that, and you are welcome. Now I must be going. It is time to eat! But, remember to look for my present. Bye for now.”

“BYE!” I called up as I saw his soft transparent figure spin upwards into the sky and evaporate.

I looked around and, at first glance, I saw nothing of his gift. I searched high in the tree, on the ground, around the tree, in any holes on the tree – still I found nothing. I sat down on the crevasses that I regularly sit on but something was different. It felt soft, fluffy and warm. It was one of the invisible chairs from Oochoo's dimension! It turned visible as soon as I sat on it. It was round, sponge-like and, of course, bright purple.

I did not know how this could protect me, but I sat in it for awhile while watching the clouds glide over the mountains. I closed my eyes, listening to the sweet melody of the birds, and feeling the wind brush across my face. When I opened my eyes, the chair I had been sitting on became a bubble all around me. I started to breathe faster and my palms became sweaty because of my claustrophobia, but then I realized the powerful light that was radiating from the bubble and me.

I wondered if it could move. “Fly over to the ground,” I whispered. I had my eyes closed at this point, and didn’t feel it move at all, but when I opened them, there I was still in the bubble floating slightly over the ground. I could not believe it! So I decided to

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